

Leighton Ford, was ambitious for God and he yearned to have a significant impact. After graduating from Wheaton College, he wed Billy Graham's sister, Jeanie, and became part of the "royal family" of the Christian world. A rising star, Leighton began preaching in large football stadiums around the world. He was named Clergyman of the Year, and *Time* magazine identified him as the person most qualified to succeed his brother-in-law, Billy Graham.

Leighton's son, Sandy, had become an accomplished track and field runner. Like his father, he aspired to become a minister of the gospel. Unexpectedly, he was diagnosed with a rare heart disease that caused arrhythmia. After an operation to address his condition, Sandy seemed fine. But then, while running shortly after his 21st birthday, the arrhythmia struck again. A few days later, he died on the operating table.

A few days after Sandy's funeral, Leighton went to Sandy's room near the university to gather his son's belongings. As he looked over Sandy's desk, Leighton found an unfinished poem. It was titled "*To Dad, for his 50th birthday: What a golden honor it would be to don your mantle, to inherit twice times your spirit. For then you would be me and I would continue to be you.*" ... Leighton wept. He thought of the mantle that would never fall on his son's shoulders. Leighton felt as if he had *hit the wall of ministry*.

... [ P A U S E ] ... It is common for runners (and athletes in any endurance sport) to "hit the wall" as they push themselves past their comfort level. Here's how one long distance runner described it: "*It felt like an elephant had jumped out of a tree onto my shoulders and was making me carry it the rest of the way in.*"

Hitting the wall is a very real physical condition. Once carbohydrates and hydration are diminished... the body wants to stop. The body burns out of energy and becomes so tired it can't go forward. ... The day before the Boston Marathon... an article in *Harvard Health* predicted what would happen to the thousands of runners:

*Come tomorrow morning, about 27,000 runners will begin the annual 26-mile... mass run from suburban Hopkinton to Boston. But if past marathons in Boston and elsewhere are any indication, perhaps up to 40 percent of these optimistic and determined souls will slam into a sudden sensation of overwhelming, can't-do-this fatigue several miles (typically about five) before they get a chance to experience the glory of crossing the finish line.*

What is true for the body is true for the soul. Spiritually speaking... sometimes we also hit the wall. ... We feel like an elephant has jumped on our back. ... We hit that can't-do-this spiritual fatigue. The Christian Life (especially if you are in leadership) is an endurance race... in which we all will at some point "hit the wall" and want to quit.

You say... "Well... why does anybody want to do it? ... Why would anyone who is in their right mind... **want** to serve God – only to experience as a certainty – the painful experience of *hitting the wall of ministry*?" ... .. That is going to be the subject of the sermon series that we begin today in Paul's second letter to Timothy.

Indeed... when God calls us to serve Him by ministering to others... He (very often) allows us to make a conscious choice... of whether or not we will. ... Now... I happen to believe that the most miserable place here on earth where we can be... is outside the will of God. ... And often God will show this truth to us... by allowing us to make a conscious choice.

I read this week that Schutt Sports (a major supplier of football helmets for the National Football League) issues the following warning label on all their helmets and on their website's homepage:

WARNING .... NO HELMET SYSTEM CAN PREVENT  
CONCUSSIONS OR ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SERIOUS HEAD  
OR NECK INJURIES WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL.

The warning label continues with some information about the symptoms for concussions and concludes by repeating the original warning:

"TO AVOID THESE RISKS [OF PLAYING FOOTBALL], DO NOT  
ENGAGE IN THE SPORT OF FOOTBALL."

I don't know about you... but I cannot even *begin to imagine* someone who has worked so hard and dreamed – all their life – through High School football... and college... and was good enough to be drafted into the NFL... and survived several roster cuts (where many fellow teammates got dropped) – SOMEONE LIKE THAT - reading this warning label and saying: *"Oh, I never thought of that. OK... no more football for me. This game carries the risk of me getting injured..."* ... Can you...?

But having said that... do you know what...? ... 2 Timothy is much like that warning on the football helmet. ... Huh...? In what way...? ... In the way that it forces us to count the cost. Here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy... we are about to see that there is risk of persecution... hardship... and *hitting the wall of ministry*.

So before we begin... I have two labels for your helmet. (Are you ready?)

*"TO AVOID THE RISKS OF DISCIPLESHIP, DO NOT ENGAGE IN FOLLOWING JESUS.*

*"TO AVOID THE RISKS OF LEADERSHIP, DO NOT BECOME A LEADER."*

(And please know that MY warning is more certain than the football helmet's warning.) You will face persecution... hardship... and hitting the wall of ministry.

But (even still)... just as I cannot see any professional football player in the NFL... changing their intent – because of their helmet's warning label... I cannot foresee any true believer (who understands that we have an eternal reward and glory in Heaven... that lasts forever) – will change their intent... because of MY warning... either. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

Today we will cover the first seven verses of 2 Timothy chapter one. This will set the stage for our sermon series through the whole letter.

This second letter... that we begin today... was probably written about **four or five years after** First Timothy (which Paul had written in much better times). Tough times had fallen on the Apostle Paul since the writing of 1 Timothy. ... When he wrote to Timothy the first time... Paul was mobile (he was free to move around the Empire.) In fact... he was on the road... hoping to visit him in Ephesus. ... But this time... at THIS writing... Paul is chained in prison (which was his second Roman imprisonment.) ... Many think (as tradition suggests)... it was the Mammertine prison in Rome. ... And if this is true... Paul was in a dismal underground chamber... with a single hole in the ceiling for light and air. This is probably where Paul was... sitting and waiting for his executioner to come take his life – when he wrote

this letter that we are about to study. ... Paul had already received his court hearing (which he wrote about in 2 Tim 4:16.)

**2 Timothy 4:16 (ESV)**

*<sup>16</sup> At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!*

(And) things must not have gone well for Paul in court. Paul writes with full expectation that he will soon be executed.

**2 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

Paul's imprisonment THIS TIME was much different than his first one. He was released from his first Roman imprisonment... only to be taken back for much harsher treatment. Paul's first Roman imprisonment is described for us by Luke at the conclusion of the Book of Acts... and here is what we see.

Paul dwelt in his own rented house in Rome. Though chained to a Roman guard... Paul nevertheless had a good deal of freedom to move around in the house. The privilege of being a Roman citizen was working for him. He could have friends to see him... he held meetings... he had companions who lived with him... and he had a great, hopeful sense that he would be released.... But in the second letter to Timothy everything is different. Instead of enjoying treatment as a Roman citizen... he was now treated like a condemned enemy of the state. The atmosphere seems to be much more gloomy and dark.

Why...? ... What had happened...?

The explanation come from an understanding of Rome at the time. Nero was the emperor. His reign began in A.D. 54 when he was only 16 years old. The first five years of his reign were peaceful and gave promise of a bright future. Nero tried Paul the first time, during these years, and set him free.

By the time Nero was in his early 20's... he seemed to have switched and become both brutal and ruthless... killing his own mother... his chief advisors... good friends... and many of the Roman nobility – in order to seize their fortunes.

Nero's thirst for publicity pushed him into the excessive acts of decadence... including gladiator combats and prisoners thrown into wild beasts in the coliseum. ... Nero would often disguise himself as a commoner and mingle among the crowd at gladiator fights... registering particular glee. (This actually led to his downfall... because it betrayed that his interest was not to protect the state... but to gratify his own savagery. Strong feelings began to call for his departure.)

In 64 A.D., fire destroyed a large section of Rome. Suspicion was that Nero set the fire himself to make way for the building of a larger palace for himself. Nero deflected the blame by accusing the Christians. Thus began the terrible persecution of the church as Christians were seen as atheists- because they refused to worship the emperor... and cannibals because they were misunderstood as to say they eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus. – That is why Paul was sought out and re-arrested.

It was a perilous time for Christianity. Peter was executed sometime - just before Paul. Christians began to meet in secret. No longer could they meet in the open.

So Paul sat alone in a cold dark prison. Can you imagine what kind of thoughts and feelings Paul had to contend with... as he waited for his executioner...?! ... Well... we actually don't have to use too much of our imagination... because Paul (himself) tells us in this letter. He is very transparent and he lets us know five things.

- **One** is that he was **lonely**. He will say in the paragraph we'll look at this morning, "*I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you.*" (2 Tim 1:3-4) Crescens had gone to Galatia (or, as some translate it) to Gaul... and Titus was off to Dalmatia (we read in. 4:10-11).
- **Two**, he is feeling **abandoned**: He writes, "*All those in Asia have turned against me,*" (2 Tim 1:15). "*Only Luke is with me,*" (2 Tim 4:11a). "*Demas has forsaken me because he loved this world and gone to Thessalonica,*" (2 Tim 4:10)
- **Three**, he is cold and doesn't have warm clothes: He asks Timothy to bring the cloak which he left in Troas (2 Tim 4:13a)
- **Four**, he was probably bored. In the long hours with little to do, that may be why he asks for the books which he left behind in Troas (2 Tim 4:13b).
- (and) **Five**, (I already mentioned that he is certain that the end of his life is at hand. (2 Tim 4:6-7). There doesn't seem to be any doubt in the Apostle's mind that his death was rather immanent. And apparently he was right.

Tradition tells us that shortly after this letter was written... Paul was taken out on the Ostian Way (outside the city limits of Rome) and there on an April morning he was beheaded. It is not known whether Timothy and Mark reached Paul before his execution.

But this was Paul's last letter (his final piece of Scripture) that he wrote. Many call this, "Paul's last will and testament." ... Paul is fully convinced that he was about to die... (his race was almost over) but first... he knew that he had to pass his baton to Timothy... so that **he** would continue the race. *"Here Timothy! Keep it going. I can no longer run..."*

But it wouldn't be as easy as that. There was a major problem that Paul first had to contend with. He couldn't just say *"Timothy – it's all yours now... take the baton... take over for me!"* ... The problem that Paul first had to work on... was that Timothy had hit the wall of ministry.

For the past 18 weeks... as we studied Paul's first letter to Timothy... we saw that it was mostly about Timothy's very difficult task of confronting false teachers (who were elders in the church at Ephesus.) Some of them had to be ex-communicated (kicked out of the church) because of the harm they were doing. ... (Now)... five years have passed – and they were still causing problems in that church. One of those ex-communicated elders was back in the church... unrepentant and worse than ever.

### **2 Timothy 2:16-18 (ESV)**

*<sup>16</sup> But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.*

Hymenaeus was mentioned in Paul's first letter – as a troublemaker who Paul had excommunicated. No one doubts that this is the same man. ... And now look... he has a different associate (to whom his poison has spread – Philetus.) By comparing THIS verse here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy with 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:20... we see that others were influenced by the false teaching...



that Timothy tried to correct) Philetus is a new name (Hymenaeus and Philetus) But he was not mentioned... in Paul's first naming of false teachers.

**1 Timothy 1:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> *among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

So apparently Hymenaeus (who Paul had taken the most severe church disciplinary action against) had come roaring back and now had Philetus – (and probably others) with him... damaging the church. ... Judging by what Paul writes in this second letter... I don't think that I am way far out on a limb when I infer that Timothy had probably decided that this has become a futile fight.

As we study these verses... it may not be much of a stretch - for you either - to believe that Timothy had lost hope for the church at Ephesus. ... What a fight (we can see) that he had! (And) we can't say for sure... but it looks like Timothy is no longer in Ephesus.

Paul only refers to the city once in this entire letter (1:20) ... and the way he mentions it... would SUGGEST that Timothy is no longer there. (He asks Timothy to think back to Ephesus.) If Timothy **HAD** left Ephesus – and (SECOND) what we see of Hymenaeus' resurgence – (and THIRD) all of Paul's trying to build Timothy back-up in this letter... another safe conclusion is that Timothy had been run out of town – (He was forced to leave for doing what was right... for standing up for the truth!) ... I think this was the case... but even if I am wrong... there is plenty of evidence (giving us pretty strong certainty) that Timothy had hit the wall of ministry.

In one of the verses that we have in our passage today... Paul mentions that he remembers Timothy's tears. We are not told what made Timothy cry – but they may have been tears of frustration. And certainly Timothy's troubling circumstances may have caused his stomach issues... for which Paul advises him to drink a little wine... in 1 Tim 5:23. ... All of Second Timothy is an effort by Paul to say "*Hang in there Timothy! You've got this! Don't give up! As well as "Take the baton, Timothy. I am finished..."*

Christian(!) If you ever go into leadership thinking that it is going to be easy... ("*Just obey Jesus..."*)... Um... you will have your eyes opened in a hurry. ... But you won't... if you compromise your Biblical conviction... and show more of a concern with pleasing man... than you are about pleasing God. (If that's the case... you need not worry about hitting the wall of ministry. ... JUST do not expect much of an eternal reward in Heaven – if any at all... Because all of your works will be burned as wood... hay... and stubble.) ... Remember it is all about what you and I are building in eternity! ... [ P A U S E ] ...

So with our remaining time (now)... let's get started in this second letter of Paul's to Timothy.

## 2 Timothy 1:1

OK... let's stop here for just a moment. ... Why do you suppose that Paul felt he needed to go into such detail of who he was? ... Yes. I know that the custom of Paul's day was to identify yourself at the beginning of the letter (which is different than how we do it today in putting our name at the end.) ... But Paul goes beyond this formal custom of his day... and stresses his apostleship... and that it is by Christ's will. Why? Did he not

think Timothy (who travelled all around the Roman Empire with him) would remember? ... Was Timothy doubting Paul's authority and/or his being called by Christ...?

I don't think so. (You see) I think what we have here is evidence that Paul intended for Timothy to pass this letter around to the churches – so that others who are struggling with hitting the wall of ministry might ALSO find help. **This is just as much a letter for us!** Timothy knew Paul's credentials... but others who would read this letter may not.

(And) did you see how Paul refers to the Gospel (in verse one)? As Paul faced his own death... he used the phrase “*the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus.*” He faced death... but his mind was on eternity. And Folks... when we hit the wall of ministry... that will be a good focus for our attention.

The gospel is for the unsaved – as it tells of how they can go to Heaven. But it is also for the saved. It continues to motivate us through hardship – remembering that our perseverance will pay-off in eternity. We aren't home yet! This world is not our home. Stay focused on ETERNITY.

## 2 Timothy 1:2

(Again) Paul goes beyond the standard opening for a 1<sup>st</sup> Century letter. And he addressed Timothy in greater terms of affection... than his first letter. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy will be more personal.) ... And (here) we see Paul call Timothy his τεκνοζ - which is a word that refers to his legal son. Paul had adopted him as his spiritual son.

Then he extends this greeting to his son: “*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.*” God gives grace when we hit the wall of ministry. (He comes through when we look to Him. I have

experienced this many times.) ... He provides mercy when we feel guilty because we had enough and mouthed off to somebody... and/or dropped out. And He gives peace when we are restless... tottering with our faithfulness. ... Isn't it interesting that Paul picked these three items for his greeting...? ... Of course... Paul selected these three things because he knew that Timothy needed to recognize them. "*Take stock in what you have received in Christ, Timothy...*" And this is what we need to do... when we feel like Timothy did.

## **2 Timothy 1:3-4**

Embedded here in verse three are Paul's words: "*whom I serve with a clear conscience...*" What are we to make of this seemingly arrogant declaration? Paul does not believe himself to be perfect. He is saying that he has been obedient to the Lord... and... if he has sinned... he has confessed it... so he could maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus.

As Paul reflected on his life and reviewed his current situation—waiting for the final verdict and the executioner's sword — nothing in his conduct caused him to second-guess his decisions or regret a particular failure. He never had to lament... *If only I hadn't committed that one terrible deed... perhaps I would be on my way to Spain right now.* He knew he had obeyed; therefore... his circumstances were perfectly aligned with the Lord's will. He kept short accounts of wrongdoing. He repented promptly.

When we don't keep a clear conscious... hitting the wall of ministry will be a HARDER thud! ... Keeping short accounts of wrongdoing (regularly confessing your known sin) – can greatly minimize your hardship when you experience hitting the wall of ministry.

Paul was locked in a prison... but his heart was free to seek the living God in prayer. These prison prayers remind me of the historical descriptions of the First Great Awakening (a movement that swept across Britain and the Americas in the 1730s and 1740s.) Just prior to it... 2,000 Puritan ministers were imprisoned in England... because they would not conform to the dictates of the Church of England. They found themselves without any means to provide for their families.

Hundreds suffered for the rest of their lives... and many died in prison. But what did they do? Like Paul... they prayed. And shortly thereafter (as though it was the direct result) – a great revival broke out – the Great Awakening!

Though imprisoned in harsh conditions... Paul still had important work to do - praying for his disciple. And as I mentioned before... I think Paul remembered Timothy's tears of frustration – and prayed very hard for him.

Paul remembered his Jewish heritage... which probably turned his thoughts... to think of Timothy's.

### **2 Timothy 1:5**

There was no doubt about Timothy's "sincere faith." He might be young... he might be weak and distraught... he might be filled with tears of frustration... but he and his faith were genuine. And he was totally sincere. His whole heart was in it.

The transcending point of this verse is that Paul believed in Timothy's faith... it was as genuine as his mother's and grandmother's. Paul **believed** in Timothy.

(Let me tell you)... This kind of confidence in another is heartening. I have mentioned to you in the past... of my 4<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School teacher. She was a very stern old woman – who you just did not want to cross. If she said memorize the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm – you did it out of fear for Mrs. Appleford. *“Jimmy... next week you will have memorized all the books of the New Testament... and I will test you on them...”* *“Yes... mam...”*

Well... this gruff old lady had a huge impact on my life. One day... as a 4<sup>th</sup> grade kid... I told her that I was going to be a pastor. ... Then... two years after I had graduated from college... I visited my home church where I had grown up. Mrs. Appleford came up to me and asked: *“Jimmy... are you still planning to become a pastor?”* ... I told her “yes”... and then she added *“That is an answer to my prayer...”* and she told me that she had been praying for me (every day) for the past 18 years. *“You are one of my boys!”*

When I got to seminary (and then later in ministry) in facing so many challenges and vast uncertainties... I would think about Mrs Appleford’s belief in me. She has been living in Heaven for about 30 years now... but she still exerts a huge effect of encouragement to me.

The effect of godly people who believe in us... is beyond accounting. Timothy was called to stand tall by the heartening recollection of Eunice and Lois and Paul. - He was their boy!

When you hit the wall of ministry – think about the people who showed that they believe in you.

## **2 Timothy 1:6-7**

We see that the gift is like **fire**. This Greek verb *anazopureo* (“fan into flame” or “rekindle”) is in the **present** tense... Do you know what that means? It means this must be an ongoing action. ... “Continually keep the fire alive” — (and more than that - Indeed blazing) — How? ... By making full use of it! Passionately exercise your gifts.

(And here is something else that we see in these two verses.) Because of the Holy Spirit’s enabling work in our life... there is **no** room for sluggishness in the Christian life. ... Rest? Yes. ... But laziness... passiveness... and timidity should not characterize the believer.

Who has **not** experienced timidity and fear in ministry? ... If you have ever taught a Bible class... Sunday School... AWANA... KIDS Church... or Bible study... done street evangelism... been in a tense meeting where people oppose you... even gang up on you... then perhaps you know this feeling. ... Remember: fight fear with the promises of God. The Spirit of God empowering the people of God is sufficient to accomplish the mission of God.

Therefore... there is no excuse for not performing our mission with diligence. God has given us everything we need. The Spirit and the gifts are ours! ... Are you using your gifts passionately? *“Well I am burned out... I don’t have the energy that I once had... I have a legitimate excuse...”* ... But so had Timothy. ... And so did Leighton Ford... who I spoke of at the beginning of today’s message.

Leighton wept. He thought of the mantle that would never fall on his son’s shoulders. ... But in the midst of his searing loss and pain... Leighton sensed the Holy Spirit calling him to begin a new ministry... one that would

mean stepping out of the limelight. ... He felt led to invest himself into a small group of younger men and women to help them “*run their race*” for God through one-on-one spiritual mentoring.

Leighton (now in his 80s) has been blessed with many sons and daughters. He is no longer an A-list Christian celebrity... but his influence is deep and wide. ... And he is now truly content with his life and calling. As Sandy’s poem foretold... the mantle of Leighton’s ministry has (indeed) fallen — not on Sandy... but on his many spiritual sons and daughters.

What a beautiful ending to the story of hitting the wall of ministry. And it can be *yours and my ending to our own story*. ... In the weeks to come... we will be studying many reasons for carrying on... and strategies... for times when we have hit the wall of ministry.